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TITLE: Bridging Theory and Practice: A Course on Applying Behavioral Theory to STD/HIV Prevention

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ISSUE: In STD /HIV prevention there is increased emphasis on the use of behavioral theory in the design and implementation of interventions. Many of the persons charge with these tasks do not have formal training in behavioral theory, yet are expected to understand and use these theories. There is also great variation across the country in levels of expertise in program staff and access to behavioral science consultants.

SETTING: STD/HIV prevention programs and program planners, including members of the Community Planning Groups.

PROJECT: The STD HIV Training Centers Behavioral Intervention Unit developed a curriculum "Bridging Theory and Practice: Applying Behavioral Theory to STD /HIV Prevention" to address the need for training in behavioral theories and their link to prevention interventions. This link is made through domains, a tool to categorize behavioral determinants from theory. Domains provide participants with an alternative way of understanding how to use influencing factors from behavioral theory to target specific behaviors with effective interventions and to evaluate those interventions. The course is highly interactive and validates the real world experience of the prevention staff while incorporating theoretical perspectives into their efforts.

RESULTS: The course has been offered 48 times in its original one-day and newly expanded two-day format by all 4 centers in Dallas, Denver, Berkeley, and Rochester as well as in other cities. A total of 1563 prevention providers have attended. The immediate pre and post evaluations show significant increases in the recognition of specific theories, the understanding of factors that influence behaviors, and increased comfort and self-efficacy levels in the use of theory. The first round of 6-month follow-up surveys now being, returned examine self-assessed skills in the use of theory, actual implementation of theory-based interventions, and real world barriers to implementing such interventions into ongoing programs.

LESSONS LEARNED: The stated need for this course has resulted in a very large demand for courses. Given the highly variable level of previous exposure to behavioral theory and innovative interventions across the country, the course must continue to be adaptable to local circumstances. The tool of domains has proven to be understandable and helpful to participants as a means to bring concepts into actual practice.

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